

Do you find English verbs confusing? Take a look at this chart of English verb tenses to help you understand when to use each one:

| | Simple | Continuous | Perfect | Perfect Continuous |
|---------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Present | speak / speaks | am/is/are speaking | have/has spoken | have been speaking |
| Past | spoke | was/were speaking | had spoken | had been speaking |
| Future | will speak going to speak | will be speaking | will have spoken | will have been speaking |

Present Simple

Use the present simple tense in English...

For general facts:

- *This shirt **costs** ten dollars.*
- *We **speak** English.*

For actions that happen regularly:

- *I **take** guitar lessons on Wednesday nights.*
- *Sarah sometimes **eats** lunch in her office.*

Present Continuous

Use the present continuous tense in English...

For a continuous action in progress at the moment:

- *I'm currently **studying** biology at university.*
- *Bill can't talk on the phone right now – he's **doing** his homework.*
- *We're **watching** TV at the moment.*

For future plans/arrangements:

- *I'm **having** lunch with Jack tomorrow.*
- *My sister **is driving** me to the airport on Saturday.*
- *Tim and Joanna **are joining** us for dinner next week.*

Present Perfect

Use the present perfect tense in English...

With actions that happened in the past at an unspecified time:

- *I've met several celebrities.*
- *He's been to Australia several times.*
- *We've already taken the test.*

With actions that began in the past and continue to the present:

- *I've lived in this house for five years.*
- *Harry has worked at the same company since 1992.*

Note: Usually the verbs “lived” and “worked.” The present perfect continuous can also be used – see the next section.

With actions that have never happened:

- *I've never broken a bone.*
- *She's never bought a car.*
- *My parents have never eaten sushi.*

Present Perfect Continuous

Use the present perfect continuous tense in English...

With actions that began in the past and continue to the present:

- *I've been thinking a lot about the situation recently.*
- *Laura's been studying since 7 AM.*
- *We've been waiting for you to arrive for over an hour.*

Past Simple

Use the past simple tense in English...

For events that started and finished in the past:

- *I worked as a research assistant from 2001 – 2003.*

- He **called** me ten minutes ago.
- We **went** to the Bahamas last summer.

Note: Many common verbs are irregular in the simple past. Check out these tips for learning [irregular verbs in English!](#)

Past Continuous

Use the past continuous tense in English...

For events that were in progress in the past (often when another one-time event happened):

- *Sorry I didn't pick up the phone – I **was taking** a shower when you called.*
- *He **was sleeping** on the couch when I got home.*
- *When I saw Tina and Sam at the park earlier today, they **were arguing**.*

Past Perfect

Use the past perfect tense in English...

For past events that happened BEFORE other past events:

- *By the time we arrived at the train station, the train **had** already **left**.*
- *When I woke up, I saw that my husband **had made** breakfast.*
- *Five minutes after leaving my house, I realized **I'd forgotten** to lock the front door.*

Past Perfect Continuous

Use the past perfect continuous tense in English...

For past actions that continued up to another point in the past:

- *Before I lost my job, I **had been working** on some important projects.
(“working” was a continuous action until the point I lost my job)*
- *They **had been hoping** Pat would make a full recovery after the accident, but he died.
(“hoping” was a continuous action until Pat died)*
- *She'd already **been studying** English by herself for several years by the time she started taking classes.
(“studying” English by herself was a continuous action until the time when she started classes)*

Future Simple

There are two ways to form the future simple tense in English.

Use the "going to" form of the future simple tense...

For plans, arrangements, and predictions:

- *After I graduate from college, I'm **going to study** for a Masters degree.*
- *We're **going to move** to a different city next year.*
- *I think the current president is **going to be** reelected.*

Use the "will" form of the future simple tense...

For promises, offers, predictions, and decisions made in the moment of speaking:

- *Promise: I'll **call** you later.*
- *Offer: We'll **give** you a ride home.*
- *Prediction: I have a feeling that this new singer **will become** very popular.*
- *Decision made in the moment: I'll **have** the spaghetti and a side order of salad.*

Future Continuous

Use the future continuous tense in English...

For actions that will be in progress at a time in the future:

- *Don't call me at 6, because I'll **be driving** home from work.*
- *At 10:30 tomorrow morning, we'll **be giving** a presentation in English class.*
- *He'll **be watching** the football game tonight at 8.*

Future Perfect

Use the future perfect tense in English...

For actions that will be completed before a future time:

- *I **will have written** a book before I'm 40.*
- *We're late. By the time we get to the theater, the movie **will have started** already.*
- *We **will have traveled** to 12 different countries by 2015.*

Future Perfect Continuous

Use the future perfect continuous tense in English...

For actions that will continue up to a future time:

- *By the time she graduates, she **will have been studying** for 7 years.*
- *By 7 PM, I **will have been working** on this project for eight hours straight.*
*By this time next year, they **will have been living** in Japan for two decades.*

Note: BY and BY THE TIME are commonly used with the future perfect continuous.